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FIRMILIAN

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FIRMILIAN:

OR

THE STUDENT OF BADAJOZ.

A Spasmodic Tragedy.

BY

T. PERCY JONES.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS,
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.
MDCCCLIV.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

FIRMILIAN, *The Student of Badajoz.*

HAVERILLO, *a Poet.*

ALPHONZO D'AGUILAR,
GARCIA PEREZ,
ALONZO OLIVAREZ,
} *Students, and Friends of Firmilian.*

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

An OLD INQUISITOR.

BALTHAZAR,
GIL OF SANTILLANE,
} *Familiars of the Inquisition.*

NICODEMUS, *Firmilian's Servant.*

PRIEST OF ST NICHOLAS.

A GRADUATE.

Two GENTLEMEN *of Badajoz.*

CONFESSOR.

FABIAN, *Steward to the Countess D'Aguilar.*

APOLLODORUS, *a Critic.*

SANCHO, *a Costermonger.*

THE COUNTESS D'AGUILAR.

MARIANA.

LILIAN.

INDIANA.

The Scene of the Play is BADAJOZ *and its neighbourhood.*

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PREFACE.

As several passages of the following Poem have appeared in the pages of periodicals, I consider it an act of justice to myself to lay the whole before the public. I am not at all deterred by the fear of hostile criticism—I believe that no really good thing was ever injured by criticism; and so far from entertaining an angry feeling towards the gentlemen who have noticed my work, I thank them for having brought me forward.

It is a common practice nowadays for poets to appeal to the tender mercies of the public, by issuing prefaces in which they acknowledge, in as many words, the weakness and poverty of their verse. If the acknowledgment is sincere, how can they expect the public to show them any favour? If it is a mere hypocritical affectation, it were better omitted. And the practice is unwise as it is absurd. What would we think of the manufacturer who should entreat us to buy his goods, because they were of an inferior kind, or of the tradesman who should deliberately announce that his stock was of a poor quality? For my part, if I conscientiously believed that my poetry was not worthy of admiration, I never would commit the impertinence of asking any one to read it.

There has been, of late, much senseless talk

about "schools of poetry;" and it has been said, on the strength of the internal evidence afforded by some passages in my play, that I have joined the ranks, and uphold the tenets, of those who belong to "the Spasmodic School." I deny the allegation altogether. I belong to no school, except that of nature; and I acknowledge the authority of no living master. But, lest it should be thought that I stand in terror of a nickname —the general bugbear to young authors—I have deliberately adopted the epithet of "Spasmodic," and have applied it in the title-page to my tragedy. It is my firm opinion that all high poetry is and must be spasmodic. Remove that element from Lear—from Othello—from Macbeth—from any of the great works which refer to the conflict of the passions—and what would be the residue? A mere *caput mortuum*. I

differ from those who regard verse and poetry as being one and the same thing; or who look upon a collection of glittering conceits and appropriate similes as the highest proof of poetical accomplishment. The office of poetry is to exhibit the passions in that state of excitement which distinguishes one from the other; and until a dramatic author has learned this secret, all the fine writing in the world will avail him nothing. Cato is perhaps the best-written tragedy in the English language; and yet, what man in his senses would dream of reading Cato twice?

I have been accused of extravagance, principally, I presume, on account of the moral obliquity of the character of Firmilian. To that I reply, that the moral of a play does not depend upon the morals of any one character depicted

in it; and that many of the characters drawn by the magic pencil of Shakespeare are shaded as deep, or even deeper, than Firmilian. Set my hero beside Iago, Richard III., or the two Macbeths, and I venture to say that he will not look dark in comparison. Consider carefully the character of Hamlet, and you will find that he is very nearly as selfish as Firmilian. Hamlet is said to shadow forth "Constitutional Irresolution;"—my object in Firmilian has been to typify "Intellect without Principle."

If the extravagance is held to lie in the conception and handling of my subject, then I assert fearlessly that the same charge may be preferred with greater reason against Goethe's masterpiece, the *Faust*. I have not considered it necessary to evoke the Devil in my pages—I have not introduced the reader to the low buffooneries of Auer

bach's cellar, or to the Witch with her hybrid apes—nor have I indulged in the weird revelries and phantasmagoria of the Brocken. I do not presume to blame Goethe for his use of such material, any more than I should think of impugning Shakespeare for the Ghost in *Hamlet*, or the Witches in *Macbeth*. I merely wish to show that the "utter extravagance" which some writers affect to have discovered in my play, is traceable only to their own defects in high imaginative development.

If I am told that the character of Firmilian is not only extravagant, but utterly without a parallel in nature, I shall request my critic to revise his opinion after he has perused the histories of Mesdames de Brinvilliers and Laffarge, and of the Borgias.

I am perfectly aware that this poem is unequal, and that some passages of it are inferior in interest to others. Such was my object, for I am convinced that there can be no beauty without breaks and undulation.

I am not arrogant enough to assert that this is the finest poem which the age has produced; but I shall feel very much obliged to any gentleman who can make me acquainted with a better.

T. PERCY JONES.

STREATHAM, *July* 1854.

FIRMILIAN.

SCENE I.

FIRMILIAN *in his study reading.*

THREE hours of study—and what gain thereby?
My brain is reeling to attach the sense
Of what I read, as a drunk mariner
Who, stumbling o'er the bulwark, makes a clutch
At the wild incongruity of ropes,
And topples into mud!
Good Aristotle!
Forgive me if I lay thee henceforth by,

And seek some other teacher. Thou hast been,
For many hundred years, the bane and curse
Of all the budding intellect of man.
Thine earliest pupil, Alexander—he
The most impulsive and tumultuous sprite
That ever spurned old systems at the heel,
And dashed the dust of action in the eyes
Of the slow porers over antique shards—
Held thee, at twenty, an especial fool.
And why? The grand God-impulse in his heart
That drove him over the oblique domain
Of Asia and her kingdoms, and that urged
His meteor leap at Porus' giant throat—
Or the sublime illusion of the sense
Which gave to Thais that tremendous torch
Whence whole Persepolis was set on fire—
Was never kindled surely by such trash
As I, this night, have heaped upon my brain!
Hence, vile impostor!

[*Flings away the book.*

Who shall take his place?
What hoary dotard of antiquity
Shall I invite to dip his clumsy foot
Within the limpid fountain of my mind,
And stamp it into foulness? Let me see—
Following Salerno's doctrine, human lore
Divides itself into three faculties,
The Eden rivers of the intellect.
There's Law, Theology, and Medicine,
And all beyond their course is barren ground.
So say the Academics; and they're right,
If learning's to be measured by its gains.
The Lawyer speaks no word without a fee—
The Priest demands his tithes, and will not sing
A gratis mass to help his brother's soul.
The purgatorial key is made of gold:
None else will fit the wards;—and for the Doctor.
The good kind man who lingers by your couch,
Compounds you pills and potions, feels your pulse.
And takes especial notice of your tongue:

If you allow him once to leave the room
Without the proper greasing of his palm,
Look out for Azrael!
So, then, these three
Maintain the sole possession of the schools;
Whilst, out of doors, amidst the sleet and rain,
Thin-garbed Philosophy sits shivering down,
And shares a mouldy crust with Poetry!

And shall I then take Celsus for my guide,
Confound my brain with dull Justinian's tomes,
Or stir the dust that lies o'er Augustine?
Not I, in faith! I've leaped into the air,
And clove my way through æther, like a bird
That flits beneath the glimpses of the moon,
Right eastward, till I lighted at the foot
Of holy Helicon, and drank my fill
At the clear spout of Aganippe's stream.
I've rolled my limbs in ecstasy along
The self-same turf on which old Homer lay

That night he dreamed of Helen and of Troy :
And I have heard, at midnight, the sweet strains
Come quiring from the hill-top, where, enshrined
In the rich foldings of a silver cloud,
The Muses sang Apollo into sleep.
Then came the voice of universal Pan,
The dread earth-whisper, booming in mine ear—
" Rise up, Firmilian—rise in might !" it said ;
" Great youth, baptised to song ! Be it thy task,
Out of the jarring discords of the world,
To recreate stupendous harmonies
More grand in diapason than the roll
Among the mountains of the thunder-psalm !
Be thou no slave of passion. Let not love,
Pity, remorse, nor any other thrill
That sways the actions of ungifted men,
Affect thy course. Live for thyself alone.
Let appetite thy ready handmaid be,
And pluck all fruitage from the tree of life,
Be it forbidden or no. If any comes

Between thee and the purpose of thy bent,
Launch thou the arrow from the string of might
Right to the bosom of the impious wretch,
And let it quiver there! Be great in guilt!
If, like Busiris, thou canst rack the heart,
Spare it no pang. So shalt thou be prepared
To make thy song a tempest, and to shake
The earth to its foundation—Go thy way!"
I woke, and found myself in Badajoz.
But from that day, with frantic might, I've striven
To give due utterance to the awful shrieks
Of him who first imbued his hand in gore,—
To paint the mental spasms that tortured Cain!
How have I done it? Feebly. What we write
Must be the reflex of the thing we know;
For who can limn the morning, if his eyes
Have never looked upon Aurora's face?
Or who describe the cadence of the sea,
Whose ears were never open to the waves
Or the shrill winding of the Triton's horn?

What do I know as yet of homicide?
Nothing. Fool—fool! to lose thy precious time
In dreaming of what *may* be, when an act
Easy to plan, and easier to effect,
Can teach thee everything! What—craven mind—
Shrink'st thou from doing, for a noble aim,
What, every hour, some villain, wretch, or slave
Dares for a purse of gold? It is resolved—
I'll ope the lattice of some mortal cage,
And let the soul go free!
A draught of wine! (*Drinks.*)
Ha! this revives me! How the nectar thrills
Like joy through all my frame! There's not a god
In the Pantheon that can rival thee,
Thou purple-lipped Lyæus! And thou'rt strong
As thou art bounteous. Were I Ganymede,
To stand beside the pitchers at the feast
Of the Olympian revel, and to give
The foaming cups to Hebe—how I'd laugh
To see thee trip up iron Vulcan's heels,

Prostrate old Neptune, and fling bullying Mars,
With all his weight of armour on his back,
Down with a clatter on the heavenly floor!
Not Jove himself dare risk a fall with thee,
Lord of the panthers! Lo, I drink again,
And the high purpose of my soul grows firm,
As the sweet venom circles in my veins—
It is resolved! Come, then, mysterious Guilt,
Thou raven-mother, come—and fill my cup
With thy black beverage! I am sworn to thee,
And will not falter!
But the victim? That
Requires a pause of thought—
I must begin
With some one dear to me, or else the deed
Would lose its flavour and its poignancy.
Now, let me see. There's Lilian, pretty maid—
The tender, blushing, yielding Lilian—
She loves me but too well. What if I saved
Her young existence from all future throes,

And laid her pallid on an early bier?
Why, that were mercy both to her and me,
Not ruthless sacrifice. And, more than this,
She hath an uncle an Inquisitor,
Who might be tempted to make curious quest
About the final ailments of his niece.
Therefore, dear Lilian, live! I harm thee not.
There's Mariana, she, mine own betrothed,
The blooming mistress of the moated grange,
She loves me well—but we're not married yet.
It will be time enough to think of her
After her lands are mine; therefore, my own,
My sweet affianced, sleep thou on in peace,
Nor dream of ruffian wrong. Then there's another,
That full-blown beauty of Abassin blood
Whose orient charms are madness! Shall she die?
Why, no—not now at least. 'Tis but a week
Since, at the lonely cottage in the wood,
My eyes first rested on that Queen of Ind!
O, she of Sheba was an ugly ape

Compared with Indiana !—Let her pass.
There's Haverillo, mine especial friend—
A better creature never framed a verse
By dint of finger-scanning ; yet he's deemed
A proper poet by the gaping fools
Who know not me ! I love him ; for he's kind,
And very credulous. To send him hence
Would be advancement to a higher sphere—
A gain to him, no loss to poetry.
I think that he's the man : yet, hold awhile—
No rashness in this matter ! He hath got
Acknowledgments of mine within his desk
For certain sums of money—paltry dross
Which 'tis my way to spurn. I've found him still
A most convenient creditor : he asks
No instant payment for his fond advance,
Nor yet is clamorous for the usufruct.
How if, he being dead, some sordid slave,
Brother or cousin, who might heir his wealth,

Should chance to stumble on those bonds of mine,
And sue me for the debt? That were enough
To break the wanton wings of Pegasus,
And bind him to a stall! Nor have I yet
Exhausted half his means; it may be soon
I shall require more counters, and from him
I may depend upon a fresh supply.
A right good fellow is this Haverillo—
A mine, a storehouse, and a treasury,
My El-Dorado and my Mexico—
Then let him live and thrive!

Are there no more?

O, yes! There's Garcia Perez—he's my friend,
And ever stood above me in the schools.
And there's that young Alphonzo D'Aguilar,
Proud of his Countship and Castilian blood,
He hath vouchsafed me notice, and I love him.
And there's Alonzo Olivarez, too,
That mould of Hercules,—he's near to kin

To Mariana, and his wealth accrues
Solely to her. I love him like a brother.
Be these my choice. I sup with them to-morrow.
Come down, old Raymond Lully, from the shelf.
Thou quaint discourser upon pharmacy.
Did not Lucretia—not the frigid dame
Who discomposed young Tarquin in her bower,
But the complete and liberal Borgia—
Consult thy pages for a sedative?
Ay—here it is! In twenty minutes, death;
The compound tasteless, and beyond the skill
Of any earthy leech to recognise.
Thanks, Raymond, thanks!
How looks the night? Thou moon,
That in thy perfect and perennial course
Wanderest at will across the fields of heaven!—
Thou argent beauty, meditative orb,
That spiest out the secrets of the earth
In the still hours when guilt and murder walk—
To what far region takest thou thy way?

Not Latmos now allures thee, for the time
When boy Endymion stretched his tender limbs
Within the coverture of Dian's bower,
Hath melted into fable. Wilt thou pass
To Ephesus, thy city, glorious once,
But now dust-humbled ; and, for ancient love,
Make bright its ruined shafts, and weed-grown walls,
With molten silver? Or invite thee more
The still witch-haunted plains of Thessaly,
Where, o'er the bones of the Pharsalian dead,
Amidst the gibbering of the Lemures,
Grim women mutter spells, and pale thy face
With monstrous incantation? What! already
Shrink'st thou behind the curtain of a cloud
E'en at my looking? Then I know indeed
My destiny is sure! For I was born
To make thee and thine astral brethren quake,
And I will do it! Glide thou on thy way—
I will to rest—best slumber while I may!

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

An Apartment.—MARIANA *and* HAVERILLO.

HAVERILLO.

You need not fear him, cousin ; for I'm sure
His heart's in the right place. He's wayward, doubtless,
And very often unintelligible,
But that is held to be a virtue now.
Critics and poets both (save I, who cling
To older canons) have discarded sense,
And meaning's at a discount. Our young spirits,
Who call themselves the masters of the age,
Are either robed in philosophic mist,
And, with an air of grand profundity,
Talk metaphysics—which, sweet cousin, means
Nothing but aimless jargon—or they come
Before us in the broad bombastic vein,

With spasms, and throes, and transcendental flights,
And heap hyperbole on metaphor:
Well! Heaven be with them, for they do small harm;
And I no more would grudge them their career
Than I would quarrel with a wanton horse
That rolls, on Sundays, in a clover field.
Depend upon it, ere two years are gone,
Firmilian will be wiser.

MARIANA.

Yet you leave
The point on which my soul is racked untouched.
Men read not women's characters aright,
Nor women men's. But I have heard this said,
That woman holds by duty—man by honour.
If that be true, what think you of your friend?

HAVERILLO.

Why—honour is at best a curious thing.
A very honourable man will drive

His sword into the bosom of a friend
For having challenged some oblique remark,
Yet will not stand on honour when the road
Lies open for him to his neighbour's wife.
Your honourable man cheats not at cards,
But he will ruin tradesmen, and will sign
A vast abundance of superfluous bills
Without the means to pay them. Honour! humph!
No doubt Firmilian is honourable.

MARIANA.

Ay, cousin. But there's something more than that.
Honour in love—How say you? Do you think
That you can stand the sponsor for your friend?

HAVERILLO.

I never was a sponsor in my life,
And won't be now. My pretty Mariana,
You should have thought of all such toys as these
Ere the betrothal. You have given your word,

And cannot well withdraw. And, for your comfort,
You must remember what Firmilian is—
A Poet. He is privileged to sing
A thousand ditties to a thousand maids.
Nine Muses waited at Apollo's beck—
Our modern poets are more amorous,
And far exceed the stint of Solomon:
But 'tis mere fancy; inspiration all;
Pure worthless rhyming.—Soft you: here he comes.

Enter FIRMILIAN.

FIRMILIAN.

O joy! to see the partner of my thought
Together with the partner of my soul!
Dear Haverillo! pardon if, before
I join the pressure of my palm with yours,
I lay this tribute on my lady's hand.

HAVERILLO.

Well, we'll not fight about precedency.

And you have come in time. My cousin here
Was pressing me too hard.

FIRMILIAN.

Upon what point?

HAVERILLO.

Why, faith, to tell the truth—for I could never
Summon a lie to meet an exigence—
Nay, frown not, cousin!—She's inquisitive
About what men call honour. I have done
My utmost to explain it.

FIRMILIAN.

I am glad,
Dear Mariana, that you laid your doubt
Before so wise a judge. Not Badajoz,
Nor Spain, nor Europe, doth contain a man
So stainless in his mind as Haverillo;
And you shall pardon me for saying this

Before your face, for I've especial reason.
You've been to me a true and constant friend.
When I had need of money ('tis no shame
In a poor student to acknowledge this)—
You have supplied me; and I come to-day
To thank you and repay you. My old uncle,
The Dean of Salamanca, has expired
Quite full of years and honours, and has left
To me, his nephew, all his worldly goods,
Which are, to say the least, considerable.
Therefore, dear Haverillo, let us meet—
Yet not to-day,—because some time must pass
Ere I receive the hoards—they say, enormous—
Of that quiescent pillar of the Church,—
But at the very speediest point of time
I can select, that I may show my friend
What love I bear him for his trust in me.

HAVERILLO.

You hear him, Mariana? Dear Firmilian!

I'm prouder of thy love than if I were
The king of Ormus! So your uncle's dead?
Go you to Salamanca speedily?

FIRMILIAN.

If I am summoned, and they send me funds,
I cannot choose but go—not otherwise.
'Faith, this bequest comes at a lucky time,
For my last ducat slumbers in my purse
Without a coin to keep it company.

HAVERILLO.

Be that no hindrance. Here are eighty ducats—
Take them. Nay, man; is't kindly to refuse?
What a friend proffers, that a friend should take
Without compulsion. 'Tis a petty loan
To be repaid at your convenience—
You'll vex me otherwise.

FIRMILIAN.

I'd rather dash
My hand, like Scævola, into the flame,
Than vex my Haverillo! O dear heaven!
If those who rail at human nature knew
How many kindly deeds each hour brings forth—
How man by man is cherished and sustained—
They'd leave their carping. I will take your offer,
And hail it as the earliest drop of wealth,
So soon to ripen to a glorious shower.
What says my Mariana?

MARIANA.

That she loves you
More for your yielding to your friend's desire,
Than if you held by pride.

HAVERILLO.

Well put, sweet cousin!

But, dear Firmilian, what hath chanced of late,
To make you such a hermit? You were once
Gay as the lark, and jocund as the bee;
First in good-fellowship, and ever prone
To wing occasion with a merry jest.
Now you are grave and moody, and there hangs
A cloud of mystery about your brow;
You look like one that wrestles with a thought
And cannot fling it down. Is't poetry
Hath brought you to this pass? How come you on
With your intended tragedy on Cain?

FIRMILIAN.

O, that's abandoned quite! The subject was
Too gloomy for my handling; and perhaps,
Out of absorption of my intellect,
It threw a shade on my behaviour.
Henceforward I'll be genial—take my place
With the large-hearted men who love their kind

(Whereof there seems a vast abundance now),
And follow your example.

HAVERILLO.

Well said, boy!
Anacreon crowned his hoary locks with flowers,
Blithe-hearted Horace chirped amidst his cups;
Then why not we? Right glad am I to find
You've done with dismals. Here's a little thing, now,
I wrote the other day, on love and wine,
Quite germain to the matter. Will you hear it?

FIRMILIAN.

I would not listen to Apollo's lute
With greater rapture. But my time is brief—
I had a word to say to Mariana.

HAVERILLO.

I understand. You want to speak of love

In the first person? 'Faith I was a fool
Not sooner to perceive it! Fare you well—
Some other time, be sure, I'll claim your ear.

[*Exit.*

MARIANA.

O my dear love, what trouble rends your heart?
A loving eye hath instinct in its glance,
And mine discerns in yours a deeper weight
Than you light-hearted creature could perceive.
What ails my own Firmilian?

FIRMILIAN.

Mariana—
I think you love me?

MARIANA.

Cruel! Can you ask
That question of me now? Three months ago,
Beside the gentle Guadiana's stream,

You asked it in a whisper, and I gave
No cold response.

FIRMILIAN.

Three months, my Mariana,
Are somewhat in a lifetime, and may give
Large opportunity for altered thoughts.
Three hours may change a sinner to a saint—
Three days a friend into an enemy—
Three weeks a virgin to a courtesan—
Three months a conqueror to a fugitive.
I say not this in challenge of your love,
But as a fixed eternal law of time
That cannot be gainsayed. I know you loved me.
When, by the gentle Guadiana's stream,
We interchanged our troth.

MARIANA.

And what hath chanced
Since then to make you doubt me? Have a care

Of what you say, Firmilian! Women's hearts
Are tender and impressible as wax,
But underneath there lies a solid fold
Of pride. You'd best be cautious!

FIRMILIAN.

Lo you now—
She makes me an accuser! Mariana!
My own, my beautiful—I'd rather doubt
The lustre of the star Aldeboran
Than the firm faith of thine unbiassed soul.
But I have enemies. It is the curse
Of genius that it cannot spread its wings,
And soar triumphant to the welcoming clouds,
Without a hateful cawing from the crows.
Mark me! I am not quite as other men;
My aims are higher, more resolved than theirs,
And therefore they detest me. There's no shaft
Within the power of calumny to loose
Which is not bent at me. I am not blind

With soaring near the sun. I know full well
That envious men have termed me libertine—
And, from the frank out-welling of my mind
(Which never flowed from impulse save to thee),
Have done me fearful wrong. And this it is
That racks my being. There's your kinsman now,
Alonzo Olivarez—he makes free,
I'm told, with my fair fame.

MARIANA.

You need not fear him.
Surely you know Alonzo.

FIRMILIAN.

Yes. I know him
As a strong fool, who, in his roystering cups,
Does far more mischief than the veriest knave
Whose power of satire makes his words suspect.
There's no such libeller as your arrant ass!
Men know he can't invent; and what he says

Gains credit from his sheer stupidity.
Hath he not talked of me?

MARIANA.

Indeed he has;
But what he said escaped me.

FIRMILIAN.

Then I'm right!
He's Garcia's mouthpiece; and I know the man
That sets them on—Alphonzo D'Aguilar—
Who swears you loved him once.

MARIANA.

If he does so,
He's an unmeasured villain! What—Alphonzo?
Had I ne'er seen thy face, Firmilian,
And did my choice lie 'twixt a muleteer
And that stiff scion of Castilian blood,

I'd wed the peasant! Do you tell me this?
O, now I understand their treachery!

FIRMILIAN.

And therefore solely have I tried thee thus.
Dear Mariana, weep not! I perceive
What hath been done. 'Tis an accursed world,
Wherein bright things have little leave to shine
Without the sullying of some envious hand.
Henceforth be thou and I sole witnesses
Against each other. Let us shut the door
To all the outward blasts of calumny,
And live by mutual trusting. Dry your tears!
Or, if you will, weep on, and I shall count
For every pearly drop with D'Aguilar,
Making him pay the ransom with his blood.
O that a caitiff's slander should have power
To rack thee thus!

MARIANA.

'Tis gone—the storm has past.
'Twas but a bitter hail-shower, and the sun
Laughs out again within the tranquil blue.
Henceforth, Firmilian, thou art safe with me.
If all the world conspired to do thee wrong,
And heap its ugly slanders on thy head—
Yea, though an angel should denounce my love,
I would not listen. From thy lips alone
I'll hear confession.

FIRMILIAN.

And the penance, sweet—
Make it no more than this.
O balmy breath!

[*The scene closes.*

SCENE III.

A Tavern.—Alphonzo D'Aguilar, Garcia Perez, Alonzo Olivarez, *and* Firmilian.

PEREZ.

You take it far too hotly, D'Aguilar—
All men are fanciful in love, and beauty
Is as abundant as the open air
In every region of this bounteous world.
You stand for Spanish beauty—what's your type?
Dark hair, vermilion lips, an olive tint,
A stately carriage, and a flashing eye.
Go northward: there's your Dutchman—he prefers
Blonde tresses, dove-like glances, and a form
Of most enticing plumpness. Then the Dane
Is all for red and blue; the brighter colour
Pertaining chiefly to the lady's hair,

The duller to her eyes. For my own part,
I love variety.

D'AGUILAR.

And so do I,
Within its proper bounds. No grander show
Could poet fancy in his liveliest dreams,
Than a great tournament of Europe's knights,
The free, the strong, the noble, and the brave,
Splintering their lances in a guarded list,
Before a balcony of Europe's dames.
Oh, could I sound a trump and bring them here,
In one vast troop of valour and renown!
The gay light-hearted chivalry of France,
The doughty English, and the hardy Scot,
The swart Italian, and the ponderous Swede.
With those who dwell beside the castled Rhine.
Nor they alone, but with them all the flowers
That send their odour over Christendom—
The fair and blushing beauties of the lands

From the far Baltic to our inland sea.
By him of Compostella! 'twere a field
Wherein a noble might be proud to die.

FIRMILIAN.

I am not noble, and I'd rather die
At peace in my own bed. But, D'Aguilar,—
Are you not too exclusive? I have read—
For I have been a student of romance,
And pored upon the tomes of chivalry—
How, ere the days of mighty Charlemagne
The South did glorious battle with the North,
And Afric's atabals were heard to clang
Among the thickets by the turbid Seine.
Yea, I have heard of knights of old descent,
Cross-hilted warriors, Paladins indeed,
Who would have bartered all the boasted charms
Of Europe's beauties, for one kindly glance
Shot from the eyelids of a Paynim maid.

D'AGUILAR.

Firmilian, thou blasphemest! Never knight
To whom the stroke of chivalry was given,
Could stoop to such an utter infamy!

FIRMILIAN.

Your pardon, Count! When English Richard bore
Upon his bosom the Crusader's sign,
And fought in Palestine, he laid his sword
Upon the shoulder of a Moslem chief,
And dubbed him knight.

D'AGUILAR.

The greater villain he!
I've heard of that same Richard as a most
Malignant child of Luther.

FIRMILIAN.

Have you so?
Nay, then, chronology must do him wrong:

But that's no matter. Then you would exclude
All beauty from that tournament of yours
Which did not appertain to Christendom?

D'AGUILAR.

Doubt you the answer of a Christian peer,
Within whose veins the blood of old Castile,
Undimmed by peasant or mechanic mud,
Flows bright as ruby? Ha! what mean you, sir,
By asking such a question?

PEREZ.

Soft you now!
There's no offence. Let's hear Firmilian.

FIRMILIAN.

I knew a poet once; and he was young,
And intermingled with such fierce desires
As made pale Eros veil his face with grief,
And caused his lustier brother to rejoice.

He was as amorous as a crocodile
In the spring season, when the Memphian bank,
Receiving substance from the glaring sun,
Resolves itself from mud into a shore.
And—as the scaly creature wallowing there,
In its hot fits of passion, belches forth
The steam from out its nostrils, half in love,
And half in grim defiance of its kind;
Trusting that either, from the reedy fen,
Some reptile-virgin coyly may appear,
Or that the hoary Sultan of the Nile
May make tremendous challenge with his jaws,
And, like Mark Anthony, assert his right
To all the Cleopatras of the ooze—
So fared it with the poet that I knew.

He had a soul beyond the vulgar reach,
Sun-ripened, swarthy. He was not the fool
To pluck the feeble lily from its shade
When the black hyacinth stood in fragrance by.

The lady of his love was dusk as Ind,
Her lips as plenteous as the Sphinx's are,
And her short hair crisp with Numidian curl.
She was a negress. You have heard the strains
That Dante, Petrarch, and such puling fools
As loved the daughters of cold Japhet's race,
Have lavished idly on their icicles:
As snow meets snow, so their unhasty fall
Fell chill and barren on a pulseless heart.
But, would you know what noontide ardour is,
Or in what mood the lion, in the waste,
All fever-maddened, and intent on cubs,
At the oasis waits the lioness—
That shall you gather from the fiery song
Which that young poet framed, before he dared
Invade the vastness of his lady's lips.

D'AGUILAR.

Spawn of Mahound! wouldst thou pollute mine ears
With thy lewd ditties? There! (*Strikes him.*)

Thou hast the hand
For once, of a true noble, on thy cheek ;
And what the hand has done, it will defend.

PEREZ.

This is too much ! Nay, D'Aguilar, you're wrong !
Alonzo Olivarez—rouse thee, man !
Lay down the wine-pot for a moment's space,
There's a brawl here !

OLIVAREZ.

I wish you fellows would keep quiet, and not interrupt drinking. It is a very disagreeable thing for a sober man to be disturbed over his liquor. I suppose you are quite aware that I can throw the whole of you over the window in a minute. My opinion is that you are a couple of bloody fools. I don't know what you are quarrelling about, but I won't stand any nonsense.

FIRMILIAN.

You struck me, sir!

D'AGUILAR.

I did.

FIRMILIAN.

And you're aware,
Of course, of what the consequence must be,
Unless you tender an apology?

D'AGUILAR.

Of course I am.

FIRMILIAN.

Madman! wouldst thou provoke
The slide o' the avalanche?

D'AGUILAR.

I wait its fall

In perfect calmness.

FIRMILIAN.

O thou rash young lord!

Beware in time! A hurricane of wrath

Is raging in my soul—If it burst forth,

'Twere better for thee that within the waste

Thou met'st a ravening tigress, or wert bound

In a lone churchyard where hyænas prowl!

I may forget myself!

D'AGUILAR.

Small chance of that.

Words are your weapons, and you wield them well;

But gentlemen, when struck, are not in use

To rail like muleteers. You wear a sword, sir!

PEREZ.

Are you mad, D'Aguilar, to court a brawl
Within the college precincts! Olivarez—
Set down the flagon, and bestir thee, man;
This must not be!

FIRMILIAN.

Nay, Perez, stand thou back—
He hath provoked his fate, and he must die. (*Draws.*)

OLIVAREZ.

I'll score the first man that makes a thrust, over the costard with this pint-pot! If you needs must fight, fight like gentlemen in the open air, and at a reasonable hour. What right has either of you to disturb the conviviality of the evening?

FIRMILIAN.

A blow—a blow! I have received a blow—

My soul's athirst for vengeance, and I'll have it!
Come not between the lion and his prey.

OLIVAREZ.

To the devil with your lions! I suppose you think it safe enough to roar now? Once for all, if you can't settle this matter without fighting, fix some hour to-morrow morning, and take your fill of it. But here you shall not fight. What say you, Alphonzo?

D'AGUILAR.

He hath the blow, so let him speak the first.

FIRMILIAN.

Agreed! Until to-morrow, then, I'll keep
My rage unsated. Let the hour be eight;
The place, the meadow where the stream turns round
Beside the cork-trees; and for witnesses,
Perez and Olivarez. D'Aguilar—

If I should fail thee at the rendezvous,
Perpetual shame and infamy be mine!

D'AGUILAR.

Agreed! And I rejoice to hear thee speak
So manfully. If I have done thee wrong,
I'll give thee satisfaction with my sword:
You show at least a nobler temper now.

FIRMILIAN.

Fail *you* not, D'Aguilar—*I* shall not fail.

OLIVAREZ.

Well—all that is comfortably adjusted, and just as it should be. Let's have some more wine—this talking makes a man thirsty.

PEREZ.

No more for me.

FIRMILIAN.

Your pardon—I'd provided
(Not dreaming of this hot dispute to-night),
Some flasks of rarest wine—'Tis Ildefronso,
Of an old vintage. I'll not leave them here
To be a perquisite unto our host;
And, lest our early parting hence should breed
Suspicion of to-morrow, let us stay
And drink another cup. You, D'Aguilar,
Whose sword must presently be crossed with mine,
Will not refuse a pledge?

D'AGUILAR.

Not I, in faith!
Now you have shown your mettle, I regard you
More than I did before.

FIRMILIAN.

Fill then your cups.
Nay, to the brim—the toast requires it, sirs.
Here's to the King!

OMNES.

The King!

FIRMILIAN.

Fill up again—
'Tis my last pledge.

OLIVAREZ.

Why don't you help yourself? The wine is capital.

FIRMILIAN.

My goblet's full. Drink to another King,
Whose awful aspect doth o'erawe the world—
The conqueror of conquerors—the vast
But unseen monarch to whose sceptre bow
The heads of kings and beggars!

PEREZ.

That's the Pope!

FIRMILIAN.

No—not the Pope—but he that humbleth Popes.
Drink to KING DEATH!—You stare, and stand amazed—
O, you have much mista'en me, if you think
That some slight spurting of Castilian blood,
Or poet's ichor, can suffice to lay
The memory of to-night's affront asleep!
Death hath been sitting with us all the night,
Glaring through hollow eye-holes—to the doomed
He is invisible, but I have seen him
Point with his fleshless finger! But no more—
Farewell!—I go: and if you chance to hear
A passing-bell—be it a comfort to you!
At eight to-morrow I shall keep my time.
See you are there! [*Exit.*

PEREZ.

I think the fellow's mad!
I held him ever as a mere poltroon;

But that same blow of yours, Alphonzo—'faith,
'Twas wrong in you to give it—hath prevailed,
Like steel against a flint. He shows some fire,
And seems in deadly earnest—what's the matter?

D'AGUILAR.

Don't ask—I'm sick and faint.

OLIVAREZ.

I'm not drunk, I am sure—but I have the strangest throbbing in my temples. Do you think you could get a waiter or two to carry me home? I feel as cold as a cucumber.

PEREZ.

My brain swims too. Hark! what is that without?

[*The Passing-bell tolls, and Monks are heard chaunting the Penitential Psalms. Slow and wailing music as the scene closes.*]

SCENE IV.

Cloisters.—Enter FIRMILIAN.

THIS was a splendid morning! The dew lay
In amplest drops upon the loaded grass,
And filled the buttercups hard by the place
Where I expected fiery D'Aguilar.
He did not come. Well—I was there at least,
And waited for an hour beyond the time,
During which while I studied botany,
And yet my proud opponent showed no face!
Pshaw! to myself I'll be no hypocrite—
If Raymond Lully lied not, they are dead,
And I have done it! *(A pause.)*
How is this? My mind
Is light and jocund. Yesternight I deemed,
When the dull passing-bell announced the fate

Of those insensate and presumptuous fools,
That, as a vulture lights on carrion flesh
With a shrill scream and flapping of its wings,
Keen-beaked Remorse would settle on my soul,
And fix her talons there. She did not come ;
Nay, stranger still—methought the passing-bell
Was but the prelude to a rapturous strain
Of highest music, that entranced me quite.
For sleep descended on me, as it falls
Upon an infant in its mother's arms,
And all night long I dreamed of Indiana.
What ! is Remorse a fable after all—
A mere invention, as the Harpies were,
Or crazed Orestes' furies ? Or have I
Mista'en the ready way to lure her down ?
There are no beads of sweat upon my brow—
My clustering hair maintains its wonted curl,
Nor rises horrent, as a murderer's should.
I do not shudder, start, nor scream aloud—

Tremble at every sound—grow ghastly pale
When a leaf falls, or when a lizard stirs.
I do not wring my fingers from their joints,
Or madly thrust them quite into my ears
To bar the echo of a dying groan.
And, after all, what is there to regret?
Three fools have died carousing as they lived,
And Nature makes no special moan for them.
If I have gained no knowledge by this deed,
I have lost none. The subtle alchemist,
Whose aim is the elixir, or that stone
The touch whereof makes baser metals gold,
Must needs endure much failure, ere he finds
The grand Arcanum. So is it with me.
I have but shot an idle bolt away,
And need not seek it further. Who come here?

Enter A PRIEST *and* A GRADUATE.

GRADUATE.

Believe me, father, they are all accurs'd!

These marble garments of the ancient Gods,
Which the blaspheming hand of Babylon
Hath gathered out of ruins, and hath raised
In this her dark extremity of sin;
Not in the hour when she was sending forth
Her champions to the highway and the field,
To pine in deserts and to writhe in flame—
But in the scarlet frontage of her guilt,
When, not with purple only, but with blood,
Were the priests vested, and their festive cups
Foamed with the hemlock rather than the wine!
Call them not Churches, father—call them prisons;
And yet not such as bind the body in,
But gravestones of the soul! For, look you, sir,
Beneath that weight of square-cut weary stone
A thousand workmen's souls are pent alive!
And therefore I declare them all accurs'd.

PRIEST.

Peace, son! thou ravest.

GRADUATE.

Do I rave indeed?
So raved the Prophets when they told the truth
To Israel's stubborn councillors and kings—
So raved Cassandra, when in Hector's ear
She shrieked the presage of his coming fall.
I am a prophet also—and I say
That o'er those stones wherein you place your pride
Annihilation waves her dusky wing;
Yea, do not marvel if the earth itself,
Like a huge giant, weary of the load,
Should heave them from its shoulders. I have said it.
It is my purpose, and they all shall down!

[*Exit.*

PRIEST.

Alas, to see a being so distraught!
And yet there may be danger in his words,
For heresy is rife. Ha! who is this?

If I mistake not, 'tis Firmilian,
Mine ancient pupil!

FIRMILIAN.

And he craves your blessing!

PRIEST.

Thou hast it, son. Now tell me—didst thou hear
The words yon Graduate uttered ere he left?
Methought his speech was levelled at the Church.

FIRMILIAN.

I heard him say all Churches should be levelled;
That they were built on souls; that earth would rise
To shake them from its shoulders; and he railed
At mother Rome, and called her Babylon.
My ears yet tingle with the impious sounds.

PRIEST.

Ha—did he so? By holy Nicholas,

I'll have him straight reported! Dost thou think,
Good son Firmilian, he deviseth aught
Against the Church, or us her ministers?

FIRMILIAN.

I do suspect him very grievously.

PRIEST.

And so do I. We hold a festival
On Tuesday next, when the Inquisitor
Is certain to be present—it were best
Ere then to give him notice. Who shall say
That, like another Samson, this vile wretch
May not drag down the pillars of the Church,
And whelm us all in ruin? I am bound
To see to that. Son—Benedicite!

[*Exit.*

FIRMILIAN.

On Tuesday next, when the Inquisitor

Is certain to be present?—Lilian's uncle?
That were an opportunity too rare
To be allowed to pass! For this same priest—
He is my old preceptor, and instilled,
By dint of frequent and remorseless stripes
Applied at random to my childish rear,
Some learning into me. I owe him much,
And fain I would repay it. Ha, ha, ha!
What a dull creature was that Graduate
To blurt his folly out! If a church falls
Within the next ten years in Badajoz,
Nay, if a single stone should tumble down,
Or a stray pebble mutilate the nose
Of some old saint within a crumbling niche,
His life will pay the forfeit. As he spoke,
Methought I saw the solid vaults give way,
And the entire cathedral rise in air,
As if it leaped from Pandemonium's jaws.
But that's a serious matter. I have time

To meditate the deed. These cloister walks
Are dull and cheerless, and my spirit pants
For kind emotion. Let me pass from hence,
And wile away an hour with Lilian.

[*Exit.*

SCENE V.

A Wine Shop. — NICODEMUS *and* TWO FAMILIARS.

NICODEMUS.

NOT a drop more, gentlemen, if you love me!

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Nonsense, man! We have not had as much as would satisfy the thirst of a chicken. Another stoup here! And now tell us a little more about your master.

NICODEMUS.

Aha, sirs! He's an odd one, is Señor Firmilian.

FIRST FAMILIAR.

A devil among the wenches, I suppose?

NICODEMUS.

Mum for that, sir! I hope I am not the man to betray confidence. What I see, I behold; and what I behold I can keep to myself; and there's enough on't. What have you black-coated gentry to do with the daughters of Eve?

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Nay, no offence meant, Master Nicodemus—you are sharper than Pedrillo's razor! What—young blood will have its way! But you are happy in serving, as I hear, the most promising student in Badajoz.

NICODEMUS.

Serving, sir? Marry come up! I'd have you know that I am his secretary.

SECOND FAMILIAR.

Aha! Your health, Master Secretary! I fear me you have heavy labour.

NICODEMUS.

Don't speak of it! If you knew what I have to do—the books I have to translate from the Coptic, Latin, Welsh, and other ancient languages—you'd pity me. I sometimes wish I had never been familiar with foreign tongues. Learning, my masters, is no inheritance. And then, when you come to deal with the Black Art—

SECOND FAMILIAR.

Enlighten us, Master Secretary—what is that?

NICODEMUS.

The Black Art? Here is your very good health! —I wish you could see my master's room, after he has been trying to call up the devil! Lord, sir! there's no end of skulls, and chalk marks on the floor, and stench of sulphur, and what not—but

I don't believe that, with all his pains, he ever brought the devil up.

SECOND FAMILIAR.

Take another cup.—But he tries it sometimes?

NICODEMUS.

Punctually upon Wednesdays—about midnight, when the whole household have gone to sleep. But he's not up to the trick: he never could raise anything larger than a hedge-hog.

FIRST FAMILIAR.

But he has done that, has he?

NICODEMUS.

Of course! Any one can raise a hedge-hog. But I'm not going to sit here all night seeing you drinking. I must go home to translate Plotinus, who was

a respectable father of the Latin Church. Take my advice and go home too—you are both rather drunk. Where's my beaver? Don't attempt to offer me two, in case I put the phantom one on my head. I say—if there is a drop remaining in the bottle, you might offer it by way of courtesy. Thanks, and take care of yourselves.

[*Exit.*

FIRST FAMILIAR.

What say you to this story? A clearer proof
Of arrant sorcery was never given
Unto the Holy office.

SECOND FAMILIAR.

It is complete.
He raises hedge-hogs! That's enough for me.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE VI.

Exterior of the Cathedral of St Nicholas.—Choir heard chaunting within.

Enter FIRMILIAN.

How darkly hangs yon cloud above the spire !
There's thunder in the air—
What if the flash
Should rend the solid walls, and reach the vault,
Where my terrestrial thunder lies prepared,
And so, without the action of my hand,
Whirl up those thousand bigots in its blaze,
And leave me guiltless, save in the intent ?

That were a vile defraudment of my aim.
A petty larceny o' the element,
An interjection of exceeding wrong !

Let the hoarse thunder rend the vault of heaven,
Yea, shake the stars by myriads from their boughs,
As Autumn tempests shake the fruitage down ;—
Let the red lightning shoot athwart the sky,
Entangling comets by their spooming hair,
Piercing the zodiac belt, and carrying dread
To old Orion, and his whimpering hound ;—
But let the glory of this deed be mine !

ORGAN *and* CHOIR.

Sublimatus ad honorem
Nicholai presulis :
Pietatis ante rorem
Cunctis pluit populis :
Ut vix parem aut majorem
Habeat in seculis.

FIRMILIAN.

Yet I could weep to hear the wretches sing !
There rolls the organ anthem down the aisle,

And thousand voices join in its acclaim.
All they are happy—they are on their knees ;
Round and above them stare the images
Of antique saints and martyrs. Censers steam
With their Arabian charge of frankincense,
And every heart, with inward fingers, counts
A blissful rosary of pious prayer !
Why should they perish, then ? Is't yet too late ?
O shame, Firmilian, on thy coward soul !
What ! thou, the poet !—thou, whose mission 'tis
To send vibration down the chord of time,
Unto its junction with eternity,—
Thou, who hast dared and pondered and endured,
Gathering by piecemeal all the noble thoughts
And fierce sensations of the mind—as one
Who in a garden culls the wholesome rose,
And binds it with the deadly nightshade up ;
Flowers not akin, and yet, by contrast, kind,—
Thou, for a touch of what these mundane fools
Whine of as pity, to forego thine aim,

And never feel the gnawing of remorse,
Like the Promethean vulture on the spleen,
That shall instruct thee to give future voice
To the unuttered agonies of Cain!
Thou, to compare, with that high consequence
The breath of some poor thousand knights and knaves,
Who soaring, in the welkin, shall expire!
Shame, shame, Firmilian! on thy weakness, shame!

ORGAN *and* CHOIR.

Auro dato violari
Virgines prohibuit:
Far in fame, vas in mari
Servat et distribuit:
Qui timebant naufragari
Nautis opem tribuit.

FIRMILIAN.

A right good saint he seems, this Nicholas!

And over-worked too, if the praise be just,
Which these, his votaries, quaver as his claim.
Yet it is odd he should o'erlook the fact
That underneath this church of his are stored
Some twenty barrels of the dusky grain,
The secret of whose framing, in an hour
Of diabolic jollity and mirth,
Old Roger Bacon wormed from Beelzebub!
He might keep better wardship for his friends;
But that to me is nothing. Now's the time!
Ha! as I take the matchbox in my hand,
A spasm pervades me, and a natural thrill
As though my better genius were at hand,
And strove to pluck me backwards by the hair.
I must be resolute. Lose this one chance,
Which bears me to th' Acropolis of guilt,
And this, our age, foregoes its noblest song.
I must be speedy—

ORGAN *and* CHOIR.

A defunctis suscitatur
  Furtum qui commiserat:
Et Judæus baptizatur
  Furtum qui recuperat:
Illi vita restauratur,
  Hic ad fidem properat.

FIRMILIAN.

No more was needed to confirm my mind!
That stanza blows all thoughts of pity off,
As empty straws are scattered by the wind!
For I have been the victim of the Jews,
Who, by vile barter, have absorbed my means.
Did I not pawn—for that same flagrant stuff,
Which only waits a spark to be dissolved,
And, having done its mission, must disperse
As a thin smoke into the ambient air—

My diamond cross, my goblet, and my books?
What! would they venture to baptise the Jew?
The cause assumes a holier aspect, then;
And, as a faithful son of Rome, I dare
To merge my darling passion in the wrong
That is projected against Christendom!
Pity, avaunt! I may not longer stay.

[*Exit into the vaults. A short pause, after which he reappears.*

'Tis done! I vanish like the lightning bolt.

ORGAN *and* CHOIR.

Nicholai sacerdotum
Decus, honor, gloria:
Plebem omnem, clerum totum—

[*The Cathedral is blown up.*

SCENE VII.

Saloon.—Pall and Coffin.

Enter COUNTESS, CONFESSOR, HAVERILLO, *and* ATTENDANTS.

CONFESSOR.

Weep not, dear lady—he is now at rest!
Nor thundering cannon, nor loud-booming drum,
Nor braying trumpet, nor the clarion's call,
Nor rapid crash of charging chivalry,
Can stir him from his sleep. For him no more
Hath the lewd tinkling of the amorous lute
Behind a twilight lattice, or the wave
Of a light kerchief in a stealthy hand,
Or lifting of dark eyelids, any charm!
No more shall he, in joyous revelry,

Ply the loose wine-cup, or exchange the jest—
And therefore, I beseech you, dry your tears.

HAVERILLO. (*Aside.*)

Why, what a ghostly comforter is this!
He tells her nothing of the yet to be,
But only harps upon the aching past.

CONFESSOR.

Bear up that coffin! Grief hath had its scope,
And now 'tis time to pause. Bethink thee, lady,
How it may fare with thine Alphonzo's soul.
There's no rich clothing in the world beyond,
No jewell'd cups, no sparkling costly gems,
No rare display of silver and of gold
Such as your sideboards show on gala-days—
But the poor spirit, shivering and alone,
On the cold sea-beach of eternity,
Must shriek for help to those he left behind.
Say—shall Alphonzo plead to thee in vain?

COUNTESS.

O man—man—man! Thy prating drives me mad—
Thy hideous voice is loathsome to mine ear,
Albeit I know not what thou croakest there!
Set down the coffin—set it down, I say!
I have not yet wept half the flood of tears
That I must pour on my Alphonzo's head.
There's a hot deluge seething in my brain,
And I must give it leave to flow, or die!

HAVERILLO.

Poor lady, she is greatly moved! 'Twere best
To give her passion way. Bethink you, sir;
A mother rarely will with patience hear
A true reproach against a living son,
Far less a taunt directed at the dead.

CONFESSOR.

Who's he that dares usurp my privilege,

Or question my discretion? Is't for thee,
Thou silken moth, to flutter round the torch
Of conscience, flaming in a Churchman's hands,
And try to smother it? What art thou, sirrah?
I warrant me some kinsman, with an eye
To those vast hoards of molten vanity,
Which can alone relieve Alphonzo's soul
Under the guidance of our holy Church.
Out on thee, heretic!

HAVERILLO.

Presumptuous priest!
Wer't thou unfrocked, I'd tell thee that thou liest.

CONFESSOR.

Hence, vile disturber of the hapless dead!
Thou enemy of souls—thou sordid knave,
That, for a paltry pittance to thyself,
Wouldst bar the gates of Paradise to him
Who lies beneath yon pall! What, caitiff wretch!

Wilt thou again presume to answer me?
Let but a word escape thy tainted lips,
And the most fell anathema of Rome,
From which there neither is appeal nor cure,
Shall fulmine on thy head!

As for thee, lady—

If thou regardest him whom thou hast lost
With holier feeling than the tigress shows
When, in her savage and blood-boltered den,
She moans above the carcass of her cubs—
Consume no more the precious hours in grief;
Each hour is precious to a soul in pain!
Give me the keys of all thy coffered wealth,
That, with a liberal hand, I may dispense
Thy hoarded angels to the suffering poor.
Thy jewels also—what hast thou to do
With earthly jewels more?—give them to me;
And for each brilliant thou shalt hear a mass
Sung for Alphonzo. Fie on filthy pride!
Is't meet a widow's house should hold such store

Of flagons, cups, and costly chalices,
Of massive salvers and ancestral bowls?
These are the subtile spider-threads of sin
That bind the soul to earth. Away with them!
Thou hast no children now.

COUNTESS.

Thou crawling wretch—
Thou holy lie—thou gilded sepulchre—
Thou most consummate hypocrite and knave!
How darest thou take measure of my grief
With thine unnatural hands? What! thou a priest,
And, in the hour of desolation, seek'st
For ransom to be paid in gems and gold
For a pure spirit, which, beside thine own,
Would show as glorious as an angel's form
Contrasted with an Ethiopian slave!
What are thy prayers, that I should purchase them?
Hast thou not fed, for twenty years and more,
Upon the liberal bounty of our house?

Have I not seen thee flatter and deceive ;
Fawn like a spaniel ; and, with readiest lie,
Make coverture of thine obscene attempts
Upon my handmaids? Villain ! there they stand,
The blushing proofs of thine impurity.
Hast thou not stroked my lost Alphonzo's head
A thousand times, protesting that no youth
Gave ever promise of a fairer course?
And wouldst thou now retract that word of thine,
And, in the presence of my blighted flower,
Deny the glorious perfume that it bore?
O get thee gone ! thou mak'st me wrong the dead,
By wasting moments, consecrate to tears,
In idle railing at a wretch like thee !

CONFESSOR.

This is mere madness ! Think not to escape.
By angry words and frantic declamation,
The righteous claims of the defrauded Church.
I stir not hence until her dues are paid.

If thou withhold'st thy keys, I warn thee, lady,
That holy Peter will not turn his key
For any of thy race!

COUNTESS.

Thou cormorant
That screamest still for garbage! take thy fill,
And rid me of thy presence. Fabian—
Show him the secret chamber of the Cid,
Wherein the ransom of the Moors is piled:
There is the key—and let him never more
Pollute my threshold! O my lost Alphonzo!

(*Swoons.*)

CONFESSOR.

Ho, ho! I have it now! The key, the key!
Come quickly, Master Steward!

[*Exit. Scene closes.*

SCENE VIII.

A Gallery.—At the end an armed figure bearing a mace.

Enter CONFESSOR *and* FABIAN.

CONFESSOR.

I WARRANT me thou thinkest, Master Steward,
That I was over urgent with thy dame.
There are some natures, sir, so obstinate
That mildness will not stir them, and for these
The Church enjoins a wholesome stimulant.
Such is your lady.

FABIAN.

You are learned, sir,
And doubtless know your duty. Here's the chamber.

CONFESSOR.

What mean you, fellow? There is nothing here

Except an effigy in rusted mail.

Beware of trifling with the Holy Church!

FABIAN.

That is the guardian of the treasure-room.

I see you marvel—Listen. Long ago,

Pedro, the founder of this ancient house,

Was the dear friend and comrade of the Cid.

Often together in the battle-field

Did they two charge the squadrons of the Moor,

And mow the stalwart unbelievers down.

Seldom they spared a life—yet once, by chance,

The caliph of Baldracca crossed their path,

Him they took captive, with three princes more,

And made them stand to ransom. All the East,

As I have heard—Chaldea, Araby,

Fez, Tunis, India, and the far Cathay—

Was racked for tribute. From the Persian Gulf

There came huge bags of large and lustrous pearl,

Which in the miry bottom of the sea

The breathless diver found. Then there were opals
Bright as young moons, and diamonds like stars,
Far-blazing rubies, gorgeous carbuncles,
Jacinths and sapphires. And with these there came
Ten camel-loads of curious workmanship,
All wrought in solid gold—a greater ransom
Than ever yet was tendered for a king!

CONFESSOR.

Thy words have oped a fountain in my mouth,
And stirred its waters! Excellent Fabian—
So half this wealth accrued to D'Aguilar?

FABIAN.

Of that, anon. When all the heap was piled
Before them, then the Campeador said:—
"May not my sin lie heavy on my soul
Upon my dying day! For I have broke
A vow I made in youth before the shrine
Of San Iago, never in the field

To spare a heathen. What is done, is done—
May be atoned for, but not blotted out.
I will not touch the ransom. Be it given
Entire to thee, my brother D'Aguilar!"

CONFESSOR.

No wonder Spain still glories in the Cid!
What! are the treasures here? Speak quickly, man!

FABIAN.

Your patience for a moment! When the knight
Found no persuasion could affect the Cid,
Or sway him from his purpose, then he yielded.
One half the ransom bought the goodly lands
Which still pertain unto the D'Aguilars.
The other half lies in a secret room,
The door of which I'll show you—you've the key.
But first I'll tell you why yon effigy
Stands there to guard it.

CONFESSOR.

What is that to me?

What do I care about your effigies,

Or mumbled stories of the knights of old?

The door, I say!

FABIAN.

Yet listen—'Tis my duty

To make this clear. When Ruy Diaz died,

The knight of D'Aguilar obtained his arms;

And in remembrance of the bounteous gift

He placed them there before the treasure-room.

'Tis said the mighty spirit of Bivar

Still dwells within that corslet; and the mace,

Which once was called the hammer of the Moor,

Is swayed on high, and will descend on those

Who come to wrong the race of D'Aguilar.

I've heard my father tell, that, ere my birth,

Two reckless villains of Gitano blood,

Lured by the rumour of the treasured wealth,

Tried, over-night, to force that secret door ;
And, in the morning, when the servants came,
They found a brace of battered carcasses,
The skulls beat into pulp, upon the floor ;
And yonder mace—how terrible it is !
Was dropping with their blood !

CONFESSOR.

And dost thou think
With thy false legends to deter me now,
Thou paralytic slave ? Reserve thy tales
For gaping crones, and idle serving-men !
Can I not make an image stare and wink,
Exhibit gesture with its painted hands,
Yea, counterfeit the action of a saint—
And dost thou hope to scare me with a lie ?
Where is the door, I say ?

FABIAN.

Bear witness, Saints,

That I am sackless of the consequence!

You are forewarned—

CONFESSOR.

The door—the door, I say!

FABIAN.

Insert the key beneath that panel there!

CONFESSOR.

So—it is mine, all mine! Why, now am I
A king of Ind, an emperor of the earth!
No haste, no haste!—I would not lose the thrill
Of expectation that entrances me
For half the glorious heap that's stored within!
Why, for a handful of those orient pearls
I'll buy a bishopric. A dozen rubies
May make me Metropolitan; and then,
As gems are scarce and highly prized at Rome,
A costly diamond for the noble front
Of the Tiara, may advance my claim

Unto the title of a Cardinal—
Let me take breath—Lord Cardinal—a Prince
And Magnate of the Church! What follows next?
Brain, do not lose thyself in ecstasy,
Nor swim to madness at the thought of that
Which lies within my reach—Saint Peter's chair!
Why, half the wealth within this hidden vault
Would bribe the Holy College, and would make
Me—me, the lord of monarchs, and the chief
Of all the rulers over Christendom!
Ha, ha! to see the mighty world lie down
In homage at my feet, and hear its hail
To me as lord and master!
Is't a dream?
Oh, no, no, no! for here, within my hand,
I hold the precious key that shall at once
Admit me to the temple of my hope—
Open, old wards, to him who shall be Pope!

[*He attempts to open the Door, and is struck down by the Mace of the Effigy.*

FABIAN.

Right little moaning need I make for one
Who died by his own sin! Poor prostrate fool,
Whom warning would not reach! Six feet of earth
Is all that even Popes can claim as theirs.
Thy span must yet be less: no funeral bell
May toll for thee—I'll drop thee in a well.

[*Exit with the body.*

SCENE IX.

Summit of the Pillar of St Simeon Stylites.

FIRMILIAN.

'Twas a grand spectacle! The solid earth
Seemed from its quaking entrails to eruct
The gathered lava of a thousand years,
Like an imposthume bursting up from hell!
In a red robe of flame, the riven towers,
Pillars and altar, organ-loft and screen,
With a singed swarm of mortals intermixed,
Were whirled in anguish to the shuddering stars,
And all creation trembled at the din.
It was my doing—mine alone! and I
Stand greater by this deed than the vain fool
That thrust his torch beneath Diana's shrine.
For what was it inspired Erostratus

But a weak vanity to have his name
Blaze out for arson in the catalogue ?
I have been wiser. No man knows the name
Of me, the pyrotechnist who have given
A new apotheosis to the saint
With lightning blast, and stunning thunder-knell !
And yet—and yet—what boots the sacrifice !
I thought to take remorse unto my heart,
As the young Spartan hid the savage fox
Beneath the foldings of his boyish gown,
And let it rive his flesh. Mine is not riven—
My heart is yet unscarred. I've been too coarse
And general in this business. Had there been
Amongst that multitude a single man
Who loved me, cherished me—to whom I owed
Sweet reciprocity for holy alms,
And gifts of gentle import—had there been
Friend—father—brother, mingled in that crowd,
And I had slain him—then indeed my soul
Might have acquired fruition of its wish,

And shrieked delirious at the taste of sin!
But these—what were the victims unto me?
Nothing! Mere human atoms, breathing clods,
Uninspired dullards, unpoetic slaves,
The rag, and tag, and bobtail of mankind;
Whom, having scorched to cinders, I no more
Feel ruth for what I did, than if my hand
Had thrust a stick of sulphur in the nest
Of some poor hive of droning humble-bees,
And smoked them into silence!
I must have
A more potential draught of guilt than this,
With more of wormwood in it!
Here I sit,
Perched like a raven on old Simeon's shaft,
With barely needful footing for my limbs—
And one is climbing up the inward coil,
Who was my friend and brother. We have gazed
Together on the midnight map of heaven,
And marked the gems in Cassiopea's hair—

Together have we heard the nightingale
Waste the exuberant music of her throat,
And lull the flustering breezes into calm—
Together have we emulously sung
Of Hyacinthus, Daphne, and the rest,
Whose mortal weeds Apollo changed to flowers.
Also from him I have derived much aid
In golden ducats, which I fain would pay
Back with extremest usury, were but
Mine own convenience equal to my wish.
Moreover, of his poems he hath sold
Two full editions of a thousand each,
While mine remain neglected on the shelves!
Courage, Firmilian! for the hour has come
When thou canst know atrocity indeed,
By smiting him that was thy dearest friend.
And think not that he dies a vulgar death—
'Tis poetry demands the sacrifice!
Yet not to him be that revealment made.
He must not know with what a loving hand—

With what fraternal charity of heart
I do devote him to the infernal gods!
I dare not spare him one particular pang,
Nor make the struggle briefer! Hush—he comes.

HAVERILLO, *emerging from the staircase.*

How now, Firmilian!—I am scant of breath;
These steps have pumped the ether from my lungs,
And made the bead-drops cluster on my brow.
A strange, unusual rendezvous is this—
An old saint's pillar, which no human foot
Hath scaled this hundred years!

FIRMILIAN.

Ay—it is strange!

HAVERILLO.

'Faith, sir, the bats considered it as such:
They seem to flourish in the column here,

And are not over courteous. Ha! I'm weary:
I shall sleep sound to-night.

FIRMILIAN.

You *shall* sleep sound!

HAVERILLO.

Either there is an echo in the place,
Or your voice is sepulchral.

FIRMILIAN.

Seems it so?

HAVERILLO.

Come, come, Firmilian—Be once more a man!
Leave off these childish tricks, and vapours bred
Out of a too much pampered fantasy.
What are we, after all, but mortal men,
Who eat, drink, sleep, need raiment and the like.

As well as any jolterhead alive?
Trust me, my friend, we cannot feed on dreams,
Or stay the hungry cravings of the maw
By mere poetic banquets.

FIRMILIAN.

Say you so?
Yet have I heard that by some alchemy
(To me unknown as yet) you have transmuted
Your verses to fine gold.

HAVERILLO.

And all that gold
Was lent to you, Firmilian.

FIRMILIAN.

You expect,
Doubtless, I will repay you?

HAVERILLO.

So I do.

You told me yesterday to meet you here,
And you would pay me back with interest.
Here is the note.

FIRMILIAN.

A moment.—Do you see
Yon melon-vender's stall down i' the square?
Methinks the fruit that, close beside the eye,
Would show as largely as a giant's head,
Is dwindled to a heap of gooseberries!
If Justice held no bigger scales than those
Yon pigmy seems to balance in his hands,
Her utmost fiat scarce would weigh a drachm!
How say you?

HAVERILLO.

Nothing—'tis a fearful height!

My brain turns dizzy as I gaze below,
And there's a strange sensation in my soles.

FIRMILIAN.

Ay—feel you that? Ixion felt the same
Ere he was whirled from heaven!

HAVERILLO.

Firmilian!
You carry this too far. Farewell. We'll meet
When you're in better humour.

FIRMILIAN.

Tarry, sir!
I have you here, and thus we shall not part.
I know your meaning well. For that same dross,
That paltry ore of Mammon's mean device
Which I, to honour you, stooped to receive,
You'd set the Alguazils on my heels!
What! have I read your thought? Nay, never shrink.

Nor edge towards the doorway! You're a scholar!
How was't with Phaeton?

HAVERILLO.

Alas! he's mad.
Hear me, Firmilian! Here is the receipt—
Take it—I grudge it not! If ten times more,
It were at your sweet service.

FIRMILIAN.

Would you do
This kindness unto me?

HAVERILLO.

Most willingly.

FIRMILIAN.

Liar and slave! There's falsehood in thine eye!
I read as clearly there, as in a book,
That, if I did allow you to escape,

In fifteen minutes you would seek the judge.
Therefore, prepare thee, for thou needs must die!

HAVERILLO.

Madman—stand off!

FIRMILIAN.

There's but four feet of space
To spare between us. I'm not hasty, I!
Swans sing before their death, and it may be
That dying poets feel that impulse too:
Then, prythee, be canorous. You may sing
One of those ditties which have won you gold,
And my meek audience of the vapid strain
Shall count with Phœbus as a full discharge
For all your ducats. Will you not begin?

HAVERILLO.

Leave off this horrid jest, Firmilian!

FIRMILIAN.

Jest! 'Tis no jest! This pillar's very high—
Shout, and no one can hear you from the square—
Wilt sing, I say?

HAVERILLO.

Listen, Firmilian!
I have a third edition in the press,
Whereof the proceeds shall be wholly thine—
Spare me!

FIRMILIAN.

A third edition! Atropos—
Forgive me that I tarried!

HAVERILLO.

Mercy!—Ah!—

[FIRMILIAN *hurls him from the column.*

SCENE X.

Square below the Pillar.

Enter Apollodorus, *a Critic.*

Why do men call me a presumptuous cur,
A vapouring blockhead, and a turgid fool,
A common nuisance, and a charlatan?
I've dashed into the sea of metaphor
With as strong paddles as the sturdiest ship
That churns Medusæ into liquid light,
And hashed at every object in my way.
My ends are public. I have talked of men
As my familiars, whom I never saw.
Nay—more to raise my credit—I have penned
Epistles to the great ones of the land,
When some attack might make them slightly sore,

Assuring them, in faith, it was not I.
What was their answer? Marry, shortly this:
"Who, in the name of Zernebock, are you?"
I have reviewed myself incessantly—
Yea, made a contract with a kindred soul
For mutual interchange of puffery.
Gods—how we blew each other! But, 'tis past—
Those halcyon days are gone; and, I suspect,
That, in some fit of loathing or disgust,
As Samuel turned from Eli's coarser son,
Mine ancient playmate hath deserted me.
And yet I am Apollodorus still!
I search for genius, having it myself,
With keen and earnest longings. I survive
To disentangle, from the imping wings
Of our young poets, their crustaceous slough.
I watch them, as the watcher on the brook
Sees the young salmon wrestling from its egg,
And revels in its future bright career.
Ha! what seraphic melody is this?

Enter SANCHO, *a Costermonger, singing.*

Down in the garden behind the wall,
Merrily grows the bright-green leek;
The old sow grunts as the acorns fall,
The winds blow heavy, the little pigs squeak.
One for the litter, and three for the teat—
Hark to their music, Juanna my sweet!

APOLLODORUS.

Now, heaven be thanked! here is a genuine bard,
A creature of high impulse, one unsoiled
By coarse conventionalities of rule.
He labours not to sing, for his bright thoughts
Resolve themselves at once into a strain
Without the aid of balanced artifice.
All hail, great poet!

SANCHO.

Save you, my merry master! Need you any

leeks or onions? Here's the primest cauliflower, though I say it, in all Badajoz. Set it up at a distance of some ten yards, and I'll forfeit my ass if it does not look bigger than the Alcayde's wig. Or would these radishes suit your turn? There's nothing like your radish for cooling the blood and purging distempered humours.

APOLLODORUS.

I do admire thy vegetables much,
But will not buy them. Pray you, pardon me
For one short word of friendly obloquy.
Is't possible a being so endowed
With music, song, and sun-aspiring thoughts,
Can stoop to chaffer idly in the streets,
And, for a huckster's miserable gain,
Renounce the urgings of his destiny?
Why, man, thine ass should be a Pegasus,
A sun-reared charger snorting at the stars,
And scattering all the Pleiads at his heels—

Thy cart should be an orient-tinted car,
Such as Aurora drives into the day,
What time the rosy-fingered Hours awake—
Thy reins—

SANCHO.

Lookye, master, I've dusted a better jacket than yours before now, so you had best keep a civil tongue in your head. Once for all, will you buy my radishes?

APOLLODORUS.

No!

SANCHO.

Then go to the devil and shake yourself!

[*Exit.*

APOLLODORUS.

The foul fiend seize thee and thy cauliflowers!

I was indeed a most egregious ass
To take this lubber clodpole for a bard,
And worship that dull fool. Pythian Apollo!
Hear me—O hear! Towards the firmament
I gaze with longing eyes; and, in the name
Of millions thirsting for poetic draughts,
I do beseech thee, send a poet down!
Let him descend, e'en as a meteor falls,
Rushing at noonday—

[*He is crushed by the fall of the body of* HAVERILLO.

SCENE XI.

A Street.

Enter Two GENTLEMEN, *meeting.*

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

SAVE you, brave Cavalier!

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

The like to you, sir.
I scarce need ask where you have been to-day—
All Badajoz was at the market-place.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

You mean the Act of Faith? I was too late:
Will you vouchsafe me some relation of it?

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

I've seen a larger muster for the stake:
But never was the public interest
Excited to so vehement a pitch.
Men did not care for Jews or heretics,
Though some of both descriptions were produced.
The leading victim was the Graduate,
Whose monstrous deed in blowing up the church,
Whereby a thousand lives and more were lost,
Stands yet unequalled for atrocity.
Faith, sir! the Inquisition had hard work
To guard him from his dungeon to the pile.
When he came forth, from twenty thousand throats
There rose so horrid and so fierce a yell
That I was fain to hold my tingling ears.
Mothers, whose sons had perished in the church,
Howled curses at him: old men shook their fists
With palsied vehemence; and there were some
Who carried naked daggers in their hands,
And would have hacked him piecemeal.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

And no wonder—

'Twas a most horrid and unnatural deed ;

My young remembrance cannot parallel

A fellow to it.

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

Yet was he quite calm :

A little pale, perhaps, but noway moved

By all their hooting. When he reached the pile,

He craved permission of the Inquisitor,

To say a word or two. That being granted,

He turned him straightway to the raging crowd,

Which, at his gesture, stilled itself awhile,

And spoke in parables.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

How mean you, sir ?

Did he confess his guilt ?

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

In faith, not he !

His speech was worse than any commination.
He curs'd the city, and he curs'd the church ;
He curs'd the houses, and he curs'd their stones.
He cursed, in short, in such miraculous wise,
That nothing was exempted from his ban.
Then, sir, indeed the people's wrath was roused,
And a whole storm of cats came tumbling in,
Combined with baser missiles. I was fain,
Not wishing to be wholly singular,
To add my contribution to the rest.
Yet he curs'd on, till the Familiars gagged him—
Bound him unto the stake, and so he died.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

You tell the story very pleasantly.
Were there no more of note in the procession ?

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

There was a fellow, too, an Anabaptist,
Or something of the sort, from the Low Countries,
Rejoicing in the name of Teufelsdröckh.
I do not know for what particular sin
He stood condemned ; but it was noised abroad
That, in all ways, he was a heretic.
Six times the Inquisition held debate
Upon his tenets, and vouchsafed him speech,
Whereof he largely did avail himself.
But they could coin no meaning from his words,
Further than this, that he most earnestly
Denounced all systems, human and divine.
And so, because the weaker sort of men
Are oft misled by babbling, as the bees
Hive at the clash of cymbals, it was deemed
A duty to remove him. He, too, spoke.
But never in your life, sir, did you hear
Such hideous jargon ! The distracting screech

Of waggon-wheels ungreased was music to it;
And as for meaning—wiser heads than mine
Could find no trace of it. 'Twas a tirade
About fire-horses, jötuns, windbags, owls,
Choctaws and horse-hair, shams and flunkeyism,
Unwisdoms, Tithes, and Unveracities.
'Faith, when I heard him railing in crank terms,
And dislocating language in his howl
At Phantasm Captains, Hair-and-leather Popes,
Terrestrial Law-words, Lords, and Law-bringers,—
I almost wished the Graduate back again:
His style of cursing had some flavour in't;
The other's was most tedious. By and by,
The crowd grew restive; and no wonder, sir;
For the effect of his discourse was such,
That one poor wench miscarried in affright.
I did not tarry longer.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Your narration

Makes me regret less heartily the chance
That kept me from the show. Is there naught else
Talked of in Badajoz?

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

Why, yes, sir—much,
And of strange import: but the cautious lip
Dares not, as yet, give utterance to its thought
In the full measure. Death hath been amongst us,
Not striking at the old, but at the young,
In most unusual fashion. Three young men,
All in strong health, untainted by disease,
Died in a tavern. Marry, sir—'tis thought
Their cups were spiced. But a few days ago,
Our most aspiring poet, Haverillo,
Fell from St Simeon's column—no one knows
What took him to its top;—another life,
I hear, was lost in his abrupt descent,
But no one could identify the corpse.
Then there's a Priest amissing—these are things

Portentous in themselves, and very strange.
Further, there's some slight scandal noised abroad
About the niece of an Inquisitor—
I name no names—who may have been, perchance,
Somewhat too credulous. 'Tis a strange world!
Are you acquainted with Firmilian?

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

But slightly, sir: I've held a bet or so
With him upon the bull-fights. Why d'ye ask?

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

Because (in confidence), I think 'twere wise
To close your book with him. I heard it said,
Not many days ago, that his old uncle,
The Dean of Salamanca, had expired,
And left him all his wealth. Heaven bless you, sir—
I have a turn for genealogy,
And, by my reckoning, he is no more kin
To the old Dean than to the Holy Pope!

I may be wrong, you know—but in such matters
'Tis prudent to be sure. There are reports,
On which I shall not dwell, which make me think
Firmilian is not safe. You understand me ?

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Your kindly hint hath found a ready way
To a most anxious bosom ! Let us go
Towards the Prado. I've a little tale
To tell you of that same Firmilian.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE XII.

The Vaults of the Inquisition.

The INQUISITORS *are seated on benches.—Behind them* FAMILIARS *bearing torches.*

Throughout this Scene, distant peals of thunder are heard.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

WOULD I could bid you welcome, brethren, here!
This wild derangement of the elements,
These fiery gashes in the vault of heaven
That stream with flame, and fright the astonied earth,
Are not from natural causes: Hell is loose;
The Prince o' the Air hath called his legions up,
And demons' wings are madly flashing by
On hideous errantry! There have been deeds
Wrought here among us of so vile a sort—

Such impious words have pierced the nether world—
That the fiends, starting from their sulphurous beds,
Have answered to the summons!

OLD INQUISITOR.

Such a night
There hath not been since that in Wittemberg,
When damned Faustus lost his wretched soul.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

Yea, reverend brother, it was even so;
And, much I fear me, some in Badajoz
Have, by their practice of unholy arts,
Sinned worse than Faustus. Stand thou forth, Balthazar;
And tell us what thou knowest.

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Most reverend sirs,
I, and my fellow, Gil of Santillane,

Both sworn Familiars of this Holy office,
Received of late commission to inquire
Touching the trade of a suspected Jew.
His dealing was in philtres, amorous drugs,
Powders of mummy, amulets, and charms,
All which we seized, and brought the caitiff here
To be examined. When upon the rack,
He, being urged by subtle questioning,
Confessed that oftentimes he had procured
Most strange material for a student's use—
As skulls, thigh-bones, a murderer's wasted hand
Hewn from the gibbet, and such other ware
As sorcerers do employ. Besides these things,
He owned that he had purchased from a Moor
A curious work upon geometry,
And sold it to Firmilian.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

Can the stars
Retain their place within the firmament,

When wickedness like this is wrought below?
Proceed, Balthazar.

FIRST FAMILIAR.

These particulars
Being in their nature horrid and profane,
Did Mordecai right cheerfully disclose.
Yet we, remembering what the vulgate saith,
Touching the doubtful witness of a Jew
Against a Christian, did esteem it fit
To make more perquisition. For that end,
I, and my comrade, Gil of Santillane,
Sought out Firmilian's servant. Him we found
Within a wine-shop—

OLD INQUISITOR.

Mark that well, my masters!
For threescore years and ten I've held my office,
And never did I know the sorcerer yet

Whose servant felt not a perpetual thirst.

I pray you let that fact be noted down.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

It shall be noted. Well—what followed next?

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Obedient to our orders, Gil and I,

Albeit habitual shunners of the cup,

Did somewhat deviate from our wonted rule,

And made slight show of wassail. Whereupon,

This Nicodemus, young Firmilian's knave,

Did gradually to us some part disclose

Of his employer's practice.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

Did he so?

A servant's tale is damning evidence

Against his lord! What said this Nicodemus?

Stand down, Balthazar—Speak thou, Santillane.

SECOND FAMILIAR.

He told us this—that long ago, in Wales,
His master had from one Plotinus learned
Most wondrous secrets: that on Wednesday nights
He was attended by an ugly imp,
Whose outward apparition bore the stamp
Of an enormous hedge-hog.

OLD INQUISITOR.

I remember
The like was said of Paracelsus too,
And of Cornelius. I myself have seen
A hedge-pig suckled by a Moorish witch.
That must have been about the year sixteen,
Or two years later. Is it taken down?
For threescore years and ten I've held my office,
And never knew a necromancer yet
But dealt in hedge-hogs! Is it taken down?

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

It is, my reverend brother. Santillane—
On with your story.

SECOND FAMILIAR.

Warily he talked
Of magic circles, skulls, and fumigations—
Of the great Devil, and his sulphurous stench—
Of phantom beavers, and of bottle imps ;
The bare recital of which monstrous things
Made each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.
I can depone no further.

OLD INQUISITOR.

Porcupines
Are worse than hedge-hogs !

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

Is this Nicodemus
Still safe within your reach?

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Right holy sir,
He is. We deemed it wiser to defer
His capture till we knew your reverend pleasure,
In case Firmilian might take sudden wing.
Moreover, I have something yet to tell,
Which, if not touching sorcery, may lean
To worse than heresy.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

Thy care is great.
Thou art our best Familiar; and I think,
E'en as thou speak'st, and lettest out the truth,
The frightened fiends desert the upper sky
And calm their thunder down. Say out thy say.

FIRST FAMILIAR.

I pray your reverend worships to believe
I act not as a spy. 'Tis not for me
To mark the twinkling of a lady's fan,
To lurk behind church pillars, or to note
The course of fervid glances. Such things lie
Beyond my office; and I know full well
That they are oftentimes assumed to hide
Most faithful service to our Holy Church;
And, therefore, I repeat, I am no spy.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

I have still found thee—as the Church hath done—
Discreet within thy function. Didst thou know
Aught that might appertain to one of us,
Or to the honour of our nearest kin,
I do believe that thou wouldst rather dare
Expose thyself upon the stretching rack
Than speak out openly.

SEVERAL INQUISITORS.

We do believe it!

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Therein you understand me thoroughly.
I am the poor Familiar of this House,
And for the movements of such holy sirs,
And of their households, have no eyes at all,
Save at their pleasure. But Firmilian's case
Demands a full divulgement.

OLD INQUISITOR.

Very right!
I gather from this talk there's something wrong
About Firmilian's morals. I have been
For threescore years and ten Inquisitor,
And always have observed that heretics
Are faulty in their morals. Tell us all.

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Three weeks ago—'twas but a week before
The death of the three students—there appeared
Within a lonely cottage in the wood,
Hard bordering on the skirts of Badajoz,
An Indian maiden. She was dark as night,
And yet not unalluring, as I heard
From Santillane, my comrade—

SECOND FAMILIAR.

Holy sirs,
I swear such language ne'er escaped my lips!
I only said that in a heathen's eye
She might find favour.

OLD INQUISITOR.

Doubtless so she would.
I do remember, fifty years ago,

A very comely damsel of that kind,
Purveyed, I think, from inner Africa—
I never saw a more voluptuous shape.
But to your story—

FIRST FAMILIAR.

Every day since then
Hath young Firmilian stolen to her bower
With utmost secresy. What passeth there
I know not. But men say she sings by night
Mysterious ditties in an unknown tongue,
Of such unnatural and thrilling sort,
That the scared nightingales desert their boughs,
And evil birds of omen flit around
To list the Indian's music.

CHIEF INQUISITOR.

Is it so
That shall be also looked to heedfully.
The fiend hath many snares, and it may be

That, in the likeness of a dusky quean,
He sends an agent hither. What I know
Of this Firmilian makes me fear the worst:
Yet it were wise to wait. I'll set a trap
Shall lure him to his ruin. Go we hence;
And in the inner casket of our hearts
Be all our secrets locked. Put out the lights!

[*The torches are extinguished.*

SCENE XIII.

Among the Mountains.

Enter FIRMILIAN.

WHY should I strive to comprehend the charm
Of savage nature, or to fill my mind
With thoughts of desolation, meanly filched
From those rude rocks, and chasms, and cataracts?
Why, none but fools affect to seek them now
For the mere sense of grandeur. To a painter,
Yon crag might seem magnificent indeed,
With its bold outline. A geologist
Would but regard it as a pillar left
To mark some age that was pre-Adamite,
And, with his hammer, excavate the bones
Of brutes that revelled in the oozy slime,
Ere yet a bud had burst in Eden's bower.

Here is a terrace on the mountain side,
As stately as the ever-watched approach
Unto the palace of the greatest king.
Your man of science cares not for its sweep,
Nor aught around that might attract the eye ;—
He calls it a sea-margin, and exhumes
The withered fragment of a cockle-shell,
In proof of his averment, with more pride
Than if he stumbled on a costly gem.
O, there is room for infinite debate
In a stray boulder ; and the jagged streak
Upon the surface of a harmless stone,
May be the Helen to some future host
Of glacier-theorists !

Such men are wise.

They overlook the outward face of things ;
Seek no sensation from the rude design
Of outward beauty ; but fulfil their task
Like moles, who loathe the gust of upper air,
And burrow underneath !

Three days have I
Been wandering in this desert wilderness
In search of inspiration. Horrid thoughts,
Phantasms, chimæras, tortures, inward spasms,
Disordered spawn of dreams, distracting visions,
Air-shrieks and haunting terrors were my aim—
Yet nothing comes to fright me! How is this?
Grant that my former efforts were in vain;
At least the death of yon poor Haverillo
Might be a millstone tied around my neck,
And sink me to despair! It is not so.
I rather feel triumphant in the deed,
And draw fresh courage from the thought of it.
Were all my creditors disposed like him,
Methinks the sunshine would be warmer still!
Hold—Let me reckon closely with myself!
Could my weak hand put back the clock of time
To the same point whereon its index lay
When first the thought of murder crossed my soul—
Could I undo, even by a single word,

All my past actings, and recall to life
The three companions of my earlier years—
The nameless crowd that perished in the church—
The guileless poetaster—and the rest
Who indirectly owe their deaths to me—
Would I exert the power? Most surely not.
Above the pool that lies before my foot
A thousand gnats are hovering—an hour hence
They'll drop into the mud! Should I lament
That things so sportive, and so full of glee,
So soon must pass away? In faith, not I!
They all will perish ere the sun goes down,
And yet to-morrow night that self-same pool
Will swarm with thousands more. What's done, is done;
I'll look on it no further.
But my work—
That grand conception of my intellect,
Whereby I thought to take the world by storm—
That firstling of my soul—my tragedy—
What shall become of it?

Alas! I fear
I have mista'en my bent! What's Cain to me,
Or I to Cain? I cannot realise
His wild sensations—it were madness, then,
For me to persevere. Some other bard
With weaker nerves and fainter heart than mine
Must gird him to the task. 'Tis not for me
To shrine that page of history in song,
And utter such tremendous cadences,
That the mere babe who hears them at the breast.
Sans comprehension, or the power of thought,
Shall be an idiot to its dying hour!
I deemed my verse would make pale Hecate's orb
Grow wan and dark; and into ashes change
The radiant star-dust of the milky-way.
I deemed that pestilence, disease, and death,
Would follow every strophe—for the power
Of a true poet, prophet as he is,
Should rack creation!
Get thee gone, my dream—

My long-sustaining friend of many days!
Henceforth my brain shall be divorced from thee,
Nor keep more memory of the wanton past
Than one who makes a harem of his mind,
And dallies with his thoughts like concubines!
Yet something must be done. 'Twere vile for me
To sink into inaction, or remain
Like a great harp wherein the music lies
Unwakened by the hand. What if I chose
A theme of magic? That might take the ear;
For men who scarce have eyesight to discern
What daily passes underneath their nose,
Still peer about for the invisible.
'Twere easy now to weave a subtile tale
Of ghosts and goblins, mermaids, succubi,
Mooncalves and monsters—of enchanted halls,
Wide-waving tapestry, haunted corridors—
Of churchyards shadowed by mysterious yews,
Wherein white women walk and wring their hands—
Of awful caverns underneath the sea,

Lit by the glimmer of a demon's eyes—
Of skeletons in armour, phantom knights
Who ride in fairy rings—and so revive
The faded memories of our childish years
With richer colour. Bah!—the time is past
When such-like tales found audience. Children now
Are greatly wiser than their fathers were,
And prattle science in the nursery.
Raw-head-and-bloody-bones no longer scares
The inmate of the cradle into rest;
And that tremendous spectre of the North,
The chimney-haunting Boo-man, comes no more,
With hideous answer, to the nurse's call.
Yet something do I know of magic too,
And might have further sounded in its deep,
But for the terror that o'ermastered me
In my first essay. Scarcely had I read
Ten lines of incantation, when a light,
Like that of glow-worms pastured upon graves,
Glared from the sockets of a fleshless skull,

And antic shapes ran howling round the ring,
And scared me to distraction. With the fiend
I'll have no further traffic ; for I dread
Both him, and that which is opposed to him,
The ruthless Inquisition. I'll no more
Of magic or its spells!

What other theme
Lies ready to my hand? what impulse stirs
My being to its depths, and conjures up
(As the young nymphs from sacred fountains rose)
The best and fairest shapes of poetry?
Why—love, love, love!—the master of the world—
The blind impetuous boy, whose tiny dart
Is surer than the Parthian javelin—
Love, whose strong hest all living things obey—
Love, the lord-paramount and prince of all
The heroes of the whirling universe!
Was it not love that vanquished Hercules,
What time he writhed in Dejanira's gown?
Was it not love that set old Troy on flame,

Withdrew Achilles from the Grecian camp,
And kept Ulysses bound in Circe's bower?
Was it not love that held great Samson firm
Whilst coy Delilah sheared his lusty locks,
And gave him powerless to the Philistine?
Was it not love that made Mark Antony
Yield up his kingdoms for one fervid kiss
From Egypt's ripest Queen? What better theme
Could be proposed than this? A graduate I,
And an expert one too, in Cupid's lore—
What hinders me to raise a richer song
Than ever yet was heard in praise of love?
Let the cold moralists say what they will,
I'll set their practice boldly 'gainst my verse,
And so convict them of hypocrisy.
What text-books read their children at the schools?
Derive they Latin from a hymnal source,
Or from the works of rigid anchorites?
Not so! That hog of Epicurus' sty,
The sensuous Horace, ushers them along

To rancid Ovid. He prepares the way
For loose Catullus, whose voluptuous strain
Is soon dismissed for coarser Juvenal.
Take we the other language—Is there much
Of moral fervour or devout respect
That can be gleaned from old Anacreon's lays,
Or Sappho's burning starts? What pious lore
Can the alembic of the sage extract
From the rank filth of Aristophanes?
Is Lucian holy reading? And, if not,
Why, in the name of the old garden-god,
Persist they in their system? Pure indeed
Must be the minds of those compelled to wade
Through all the dunghills of antiquity,
If they escape without some lasting stain.
What do our moralists? To make things clear
Which otherwise might 'scape the youthful sense,
They write Pantheons—wherein you may read,
In most exact and undisguised detail,
The loves of Jove with all his relatives,

Besides some less conspicuous amours
With Danaë, Europa, and the like.
What merrier jests can move the schoolboy's spleen,
Than the rich tale of Vulcan and of Mars;
Or of Apollo, when, in hot pursuit
Of Daphne, 'stead of tresses in his hand,
He found a garland of the laurel leaves?
Well-thumbed, be sure, the precious pages are
That tell of Venus and of Mercury!
And shall the men, who do not shrink to teach
Such saving doctrine to their tender sons,
Accuse me if I shrine the same in verse,
And with most sweet seductive harmony,
Proclaim the reign of Love o'er all the world?
Henceforward then, avaunt, ye direful thoughts
That have oppressed the caverns of my brain!
I am discharged from guilt, and free from blood
Which was but shed through misconceived desire!
How glorious is the lightness of the soul
That gleams within me now! I am like one

Who, after hours of horrid darkness passed
Within the umbrage of a thunder-cloud,
Beholds once more the liquid light of day
Streaming above him, when the splendid sun
Calls up the vapours to his own domain,
And the great heap moves slowly down the vale,
Muttering, in anger, for its victim lost!
Now could I roll, as gaily as a child,
On the fresh carpet of the unsown flowers—
Now could I raise my voice in innocent glee,
And shout from cataract unto cataract—
But that a single thought disturbs me yet;
My vow to Mariana—Will she bear
That frank communion which I must achieve
Ere yet my song is perfect? She is proud,
And somewhat overbearing in her walk,
Yet there's no woman past the power to tame.
A Count of Stolberg once,—a wedded man,
Whose restless disposition drove him on
To wear the cross, and fight in Palestine—

Was taken captive by an Emir there,
And 'scaped from prison solely by the aid
Of the one daughter of his enemy.
'Tis said that, when he brought the damsel home,
The Christian matron no remonstrance made,
But took her, like a sister, to her heart,
And the blest three lived on in unison.
Why should I not revive the earlier days?
Why should the stately Mariana look
More coldly upon Lilian, or that flower
That I have gathered from the Afric plains,
Than Rachel on her handmaid? I can quote
Sufficient texts to still her first harangue,
If she be angry. Will she so endure?
Kind Cupid, aid! In this, I must be sure!

[*Exit.*

SCENE XIV.

A Garden.—FIRMILIAN. MARIANA.

FIRMILIAN.

My Mariana!

MARIANA.

O my beautiful!

My seraph love—my panther of the wild—

My moon-eyed leopard—my voluptuous lord!

O, I am sunk within a sea of bliss,

And find no soundings!

FIRMILIAN.

Shall I answer back?

As the great Earth lies silent all the night,

And looks with hungry longing on the stars,

Whilst its huge heart beats on its granite ribs
With measured pulsings of delirious joy—
So look I, Mariana, on thine eyes!

MARIANA.

Ah, dearest, wherefore are we fashioned thus?
I cannot always hang around thy neck
And plant vermilion kisses on thy brow;
I cannot clasp thee, as yon ivy bush—
Too happy ivy!—holds, from year to year,
The stalwart oak within her firm embrace,
Mixing her tresses fondly up with his,
Like some young Jewish maid with Absalom's.
Nay, hold, Firmilian! do not pluck that rose!

FIRMILIAN.

Why not? it is a fair one.

MARIANA.

Are fair things

Made only to be plucked? O fie on thee!
I did not think my lord a libertine!

FIRMILIAN.

Yet, sweetest, with your leave I'll take the rose,
For there's a moral in it.—Look you here.
'Tis fair, and sweet, and in its clustered leaves
It carries balmy dew: a precious flower,
And vermeil-tinctured, as are Hebe's lips.
Yet say, my Mariana, could you bear
To gaze for ever only upon this,
And fling the rest of Flora's casket by?

MARIANA.

No, truly—I would bind it up with more,
And make a fitting posy for my breast.
If I were stinted in my general choice,
I'd crop the lily, tender, fresh, and white,—
The shrinking pretty lily—and would give
Its modest contrast to the gaudier rose.

What next? some flower that does not love the day—
The dark, full-scented night-stock well might serve
To join the other two.

FIRMILIAN.

A sweet selection!
Think'st thou they'd bloom together on one breast
With a united fragrance?

MARIANA.

Wherefore not?
It is by union that all things are sweet.

FIRMILIAN.

Thou speakest well! I joy, my Mariana,
To find thy spirit overleaps the pale
Of this mean world's injurious narrowness!
Never did Socrates proclaim a truth
More beautiful than welled from out thy lips—
"It is by union that all things are sweet."

Thou, darling, art my rose—my dewy rose—
The which I'll proudly wear, but not alone.
Dost comprehend me?

MARIANA.

Ha! Firmilian—
How my eyes dazzle!

FIRMILIAN.

Let me show you now
The lily I have ta'en to bind with thee.

[*He brings* LILIAN *from the Summer-house.*

MARIANA.

Is this a jest, Firmilian?

FIRMILIAN.

Could I jest
With aught so fair and delicate as this?
Nay, come—no coyness! Both of you embrace.

Then to my heart of hearts—

MARIANA.

Soft you a moment!

Methinks the posy is not yet complete.
Say, for the sake of argument, I share
My rights with this pale beauty—(for she's pretty;
Although so fragile and so slight a thing,
That a mere puff of April wind would mar her)—
Where is the night-stock?

FIRMILIAN *brings* INDIANA *from the tool-house.*

Here!

MARIANA.

A filthy negress!

Abominable!

LILIAN.

Mercy on me! what blubber lips she has!

MARIANA, *furiously to* FIRMILIAN.

You nasty thing! Is this your poetry—
Your high soul-scheming and philosophy?
I hate and loathe you! (*To Indiana*).—Rival of my
shoe,
Go, get thee gone, and hide thee from the day
That loathes thine ebon skin! Firmilian—
You'll hear of this! My brother serves the king.

LILIAN.

My uncle is the chief Inquisitor,
And he shall know of this ere curfew tolls!
What! Shall I share a husband with a coal?

MARIANA.

Right, girl! I love thee even for that word—
The Inquisition makes most rapid work,
And, in its books, that caitiff's name is down!

FIRMILIAN.

Listen one moment! When I was a babe,
And in my cradle puling for my nurse,
There fell a gleam of glory on the floor,
And in it, darkly standing, was a form—

MARIANA.

A negress, probably! Farewell awhile—
When next we meet—the faggot and the pile!
Come, Lilian!

[*Exeunt.*

INDIANA.

I shake from head to foot with sore affright—
What will become of me?

FIRMILIAN.

Who cares? Good night!

[*Scene closes.*

SCENE XV.

A Barren Moor.—Night—Mist and fog.

Enter FIRMILIAN.

THEY'RE hot upon my traces! Through the mist
I heard their call and answer—and but now,
As I was crouching 'neath a hawthorn bush,
A dark Familiar swiftly glided by,
His keen eyes glittering with the lust of death.
If I am ta'en, the faggot and the pile
Await me! Horror! Rather would I dare.
Like rash Empedocles, the Etna gulf,
Than writhe before the slaves of bigotry.
Where am I? If my mind deceives me not,
Upon that common where, two years ago,
An old blind beggar came and craved an alms.

Thereby destroying a stupendous thought
Just bursting in my mind—a glorious bud
Of poesy, but blasted ere its bloom!
I bade the old fool take the leftward path,
Which leads to the deep quarry, where he fell—
At least I deem so, for I heard a splash—
But I was gazing on the gibbous moon,
And durst not lower my celestial flight
To care for such an insect-worm as he!

How cold it is! The mist comes thicker on.
Ha!—what is that? I see around me lights
Dancing and flitting, yet they do not seem
Like torches either—and there's music too!
I'll pause and listen.

Chorus of Ignes Fatui.

Follow, follow, follow!
Over hill and over hollow;
It is ours to lead the way,
When a sinner's footsteps stray—

Cheering him with light and song,
On his doubtful path along.
Hark, hark! The watch-dogs bark.
There's a crash, and a splash, and a blind man's cry,
But the Poet looks tranquilly up at the sky!

FIRMILIAN.

Is it the echo of an inward voice,
Or spirit-words that make my flesh to creep,
And send the cold blood choking to my heart?
I'll shift my ground a little—

Chorus of IGNES FATUI.

Flicker, flicker, flicker!
Quicker still, and quicker.
Four young men sate down to dine,
And still they passed the rosy wine;
Pure was the cask, but in the flask
There lay a certain deadly powder—
Ha! his heart is beating louder!

Ere the day had passed away,
Garcia Perez lifeless lay!
Hark! his mother wails Alphonzo,
Never more shall strong Alonzo
Drink the wine of Ildefronso.

FIRMILIAN.

O horror! horror! 'twas by me they died;
I'll move yet farther on—

Chorus of IGNES FATUI.

In the vaults under
Bursts the red thunder;
Up goes the cathedral,
Priest, people, and bedral!
Ho! ho! ho! ho!

FIRMILIAN.

My brain is whirling like a potter's wheel!
O Nemesis!

Chorus of Ignes Fatui.

The Muses sing in their charmèd ring,
And Apollo weeps for him who sleeps,
Alas! on a hard and a stony pillow—
Haverillo! Haverillo!

FIRMILIAN.

I shall go mad!

Chorus of Ignes Fatui.

Give him some respite—give him some praise—
One good deed he has done in his days;
Chaunt it, and sing it, and tell it in chorus—
He has flattened the cockscomb of Apollodorus!

FIRMILIAN.

Small comfort that! The death of a shard-beetle,
Albeit the poorest and the paltriest thing
That crawls round refuse, cannot weigh a grain

Against the ponderous avalanche of guilt
That hangs above me! O me miserable!
I'll grope my way yet further.

Chorus of Ignes Fatui.

Firmilian! Firmilian!
What have you done to Lilian?
There's a cry from the grotto, a sob by the stream,
A woman's loud wailing, a little babe's scream!
How fared it with Lilian,
In the pavilion,
Firmilian, Firmilian?

FIRMILIAN.

Horror! I'm lost!—

Chorus of Ignes Fatui.

Ho! ho! ho!
Deep in the snow
Lies a black maiden from Africa's shore!

Hasten, and shake her—

You never shall wake her—

She'll roam through the glens of the Atlas no more!

Stay, stay, stay!

This way—this way—

There's a pit before, and a pit behind,

And the seeing man walks in the path of the blind!

[FIRMILIAN *falls into the quarry. The* IGNES FATUI *dance as the curtain descends.*

FINIS.

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